

Akunne African Association

**Submission on Ways to Improve Living Conditions of Refugees,
Asylum Seekers and Torture Claimants in Hong Kong**

To: Hon CHAN Yuen-han, SBS, JP
Chairperson of Panel on Welfare Services, Legislative Council

About our Association

An aim of Akunne African Association ("Association") is to assist African ethnic minorities living in Wang Toi Shan located in Pat Heung, Yuen Long to integrate into the community. Some members are torture claimants from Nigeria and they live in the Wang Toi Shan. The total number of members is about 40.

Difficulties and Needs encountered by Members

Regarding accommodation at present, because of limited allowances given to asylum seekers and torture claimants, they may only rent poor subdivided units in Wang Toi Shan. As they do not have or receive any cash allowance for a two months' rent advance or deposit, being demanded by the house owners, thereby causing them the difficulty to find better places to rent.

Regarding food and daily necessities, on average, our members will go to the specified service units of International Social Service Hong Kong Branch to take food and necessities every week. However, the choice of food is few and the food, some of the time, is not in good quality. Also, the issue of daily necessities is very wasteful. Toothbrush and toothpaste were issued each time. Our members think that it is better if the food and daily necessities are issued in a more economical way, the resources saved may subsidize their limited rental allowance and provision of foods.

At present, employment of asylum seekers and torture claimants, of which some, are our members is prohibited in Hong Kong. They do not know how to utilize their time everyday. As a result, their lifestyle is idle and many of them have emotional problem and even depression. The situation of our members is worrying.

Recommendations

1. Regarding accommodation, our association suggests that rental allowance should include two months' rent in advance or deposit and the amount should be increased so that refugees, asylum seekers and torture claimants may be easier to search for their suitable living places and live with dignity.

2. Regarding food and daily necessities, International Social Service Hong Kong Branch should provide coupons of supermarkets and meal coupons of fast-food restaurants for refugees, asylum seekers and torture claimants to choose, so that they may have options to choose either to take the food or take the coupons. As a result, there is an increase in flexibility of provision of choices of food and daily necessities and the well-beings of them will be increased.
3. According to some information, employment under specified conditions of asylum seekers is permitted in some countries such as Australia, United Kingdoms and United States of America. Our association suggests that in Hong Kong, employment of refugees, asylum seekers and torture claimants should be permitted under the conditions of not affecting local labour market such as setting up income upper limit and restriction of doing specified work, etc.. For example, at present, it is hard to employ sufficient employees to work in some lower level jobs. If the government permits refugees, asylum seekers and torture claimants to work under the conditions similar to the domestic helpers having their income restrictions, refugees, asylum seekers and torture claimants may work in those lower level jobs having insufficient employees, including cleaners, dishwashers and construction workers. According to the expression of some psychologists, in modern societies, individuals are most likely to work in organizations and institutions. Workplace becomes one of the important places in his/her daily living. In workplace, individual may develop interpersonal relationship and search for his/her self-worth. If refugees, asylum seekers and torture claimants have income, they may rent suitable living places, buy their favourite food by themselves so that they may become less dependent to the government and increase their living standards, integrate with the community and live with dignity and self-worth. As a result, they may help fulfill the job vacancies in the labour market and the manpower of labour market may be improved.
4. As members living in Hong Kong, our members do not want to become a burden in society, but would rather contribute to the community through working. They prefer to rely on their hands to work with dignity to earn income, rather than unwillingly accept government humanitarian assistance. With their income, they will be able to have self-determination to search for suitable place to rent, purchase their favourite foods, and even pay for their taxes, if necessary. During their spare time, they may contribute to the voluntary services so that they may improve their lives, integrate into the community and live with dignity.

Based on the situations mentioned above, our association cordially requests your good office, if possible, to hold a meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services to discuss

the issues mentioned above with Labour and Welfare Bureau, Social Welfare Department, Security Bureau, International Social Service Hong Kong Branch and other interested parties regarding the issue of refugees, asylum seekers and torture claimants in Hong Kong.

In conclusion, on behalf of the association, we thank for your expected favourable consideration of the above observations and suggestions.

Akunne African Association

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Contact persons:

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